Ex-CIA Head, Turner, Urges Intelligence

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"Intelligence is a key leverage to the future of the United States," declared Admiral Stansfield Turner, the Director of the CIA under Jimmy Carter, in a SFS Deans Seminar last week, responding to questions about the agency in the past administration and the state of intelligence in the United States. Turner emphasized some conflicts present in the administration of the CIA and cited the new direction that the agency will be taking in the future.

Looking back to the role of the CIA in past years, Turner said "intelligence has become decidedly more important in recent years. Twenty or thirty years ago, we had such obvious dominance in world affairs that there was no need to understand the inner economies and cultures of different societies. Now that we are so near parity with countries, it has become important to know all we can about them. Intelligence has had to expand into areas that we never had to before. Terrorism, the health of foreign leaders, the effect of economic policies were topics that never really concerned us. Twenty years ago we didn't even know the names of many countries. Now there are some 150 in the U.N., and if you don't know what makes them tick, you have 150 problems."

Pointing to some conflicts that the director of the CIA has to face, Turner noted, "the most important problem I faced was trying to maintain an unbiased orchestration of intelligence. The White House, for example, is obviously looking for intelligence that supports their policies. Although the pressures are not malicious, there is the tendency to be swayed. I'm sure the intelligence gatherers in El Salvador were under pressure to give the administration some evidence that their policy was valid. I was, for example, under pressure during the SALT talks to find that the policies taken by the administration were verifiable."

Addressing the charges that the Carter Administration has allowed the CIA to slip from real expertise, and the Reagan Administration's attempts to lift many of the restrictions placed on the agency, Turner said, "The lifting of these restrictions really hasn't changed anything; the restrictions largely concerned the privacy of the American people. They really weren't inhibiting. What's happening is not an unleashing of the agency, but only reforms to help them keep secrets better. For example, making the CIA report to only two committees instead of eight."

"The whole ruckus about the so-called 'blood-letting' at the agency and the loss of a great pool of talent was not true. We took the cuts mostly from the bottom 5 percent of the personnel.

Since the CIA has been in operation for 30 years, it had started to reach stagnation. There was a great glut at the top, we were over supervised and over staffed. The CIA needed a jolt, an infusion of new spirit. With the old personnel, many had been set in their ways, but I felt it was important to adapt and change with the times. I will reemphasize that we only cut from the bottom 5 percent. True, morale did suffer. Many of the younger agents were worried about job security, when in actuality, we had cleared the way for the newer agents to rise."

The Central Intelligence is now beginning to move in new directions, according Turner. He noted that the agency should begin to explore societal changes to better understand the workings of countries. He emphasized the growing importance of economics in intelligence, and said, "the USA doesn't really understand what economic warfare is all about, and we are in economic warfare today. We really want more spys with economic degrees." He also commented on the importance of the commercial intelligence, and said that he thought that the CIA should begin to help the business community in informing it of trends that are important to economic concerns. Summing up, Turner commented, "We used to dominate the world scene, and now we compete in it. We have to understand the other fellow if we want to stay on top."